



Jith's Story

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If everything was an allusion to illusion, life could have been handled with alacrity. Life was an illusion, and love was the worst allusion to a reality which was filled with illusion. Love removed the illusionary nature of love and turned it into a hyperreality blurring fact and fiction. It promoted a specific narrative, a dialogic and “stated” that it removed the banking nature of existence. But love itself was banking, governed by notions brought down from generation to generation, from kpop song to kpop song, from songs of Milton¹ to Victor¹, from movies to Instagram, from facebooking couples who travelled to those who cooked.

Love was the last thing that should have come into his mind right now. But Jith was feeling delirious and mind in pain minus antidepressants to invoke serotonin played devilish, devious tricks. It made you vulnerable and susceptible to life's advances which at times attempted to go against its own structural dictates.

The screen of the laptop was staring at him as if to say there was nothing wrong in Firozha Bhag and life went on for its inhabitants despite what the Shiv Sena did. How strange. Jith for a minute could not understand why Mistry did not pay any attention to that. The whole Maharashtra is for Marathi's must have affected the Parsi community as well. But well as long as Chacko did nothing more than sleep with one or two women it would not have mattered. Mamaachchi did not say anything against it. Ammu never openly revolted. The twins rarely noticed. Maybe ammu was more interested in the heterotopia on the banks of the Kottayam river. Their ghosts must be intertwined right now and surely, Jith thought, surely, Pozzo must be a homosexual and that he was into BDSM. If not, why would he drag Lucky on a leash. Forget about Hegel and the Master-Bondsman dynamics.

Jith remembered how his Professor who was a Dr back then did lectures. The brilliant woman would come to class dressed in a shalwar or an old denim, carrying a huge cup full of plain tea or tea along with a fishbun. She would then put one leg up on the chair, hair streaked with silver strands disheveled, put her spectacles on, smile and begin the lecture. She talked and her lecture was more of a chat. That chat, minus all the stupid new -found nonsense relating to powerpoint, measurable outcomes, objectives, course maps and that obscene pornographic voyeuristic thing called quality assurance had the magical Frierian touch. It made the students think. It made them talk. She taught deconstruction through a chat in the class and even todate,

Jith remembered structure sign and play in the discourse of human sciences and Spivak's Can the Subaltern Speak. The University and its classes were now something else. They were quality assured, Sexual and Gender based violence protected spaces. Jith smiled when he remembered all these. How can one apply quality assurance to Jith's former Prof's class? How could those idiotic principles regulate what the great man who had a room upstairs to himself do? He was a known cultural theorist, an anti-establishment person who Jith called a flickering presence. He was there but not there, and at times worse than the ideology of the panopticon in a terrifying sense. Wittgenstein must be quality controlled now. Time was such a bastard. It changed everything, removed all what was good and left nothing but nostalgia. But Jith could still see Prufrock walk the streets and the dog start rising up in the sky. He could visualize what Elliot thought about when he wrote the Wasteland and remember Rasanayagam's² smile. Not to mention, Jith could still see Edna wade naked through the sea and how the students' eyes watched god when unannounced spot examinations were given.

He was almost half asleep on his desk and Jith wondered why he suddenly began to think of a bygone era. Work was a bit irritating and the whole Faculty premises was adorned with bright yellow colored posters filled with red lines and black lettering stating that a particular Unit was creating discord and discontent within the Faculty by dividing the students up into groups. They even signed a petition demanding that the Faculty administration transfer a certain member of the Unit blaming the bloke that he was behind all that happened. Jith knew what happened and the bottom line was simple. The senior students did not get their way with the new entrants and this was the only means through which they could vent their frustration at not being able to inculcate the newcomers into what they termed as a subculture through ragging. The new entrants were given lecture after lecture by the senior students and were at times verbally, physically and sexually

abused. Just so that the certain idiotic Marxist parties could ensure that they had numbers behind them when staging protests for this and that. Most of the students did not even know who Marx was let alone Gramsci. But well, year in year out, this horrendous ritual, barbaric at most, was conducted at various levels through various means to promote and create a so called socialist-counter hegemonic society. Fart at that!!!!

Jith did not have time to worry about all that, but the constant chuntering and bickering from sedentary positions, as John Bercow would have said, got on his nerves. If it was someone today, it could be somebody else tomorrow. Anyway, this time around, the Faculty was firm unlike certain other wavering entities which offered degrees within the same space. There were some faculties akin to Dosai/Masalawada shops dolling out chai. The only thing missing in front of some of those Faculties were boards of checkers to pass time. Time Pass.

He looked out of the window and saw the students moving towards the canteens outside like age old dinosaurs bunched together hanging on for comfort and dear life. They were not allowed to eat from outside places and had to go use that one particular canteen, just like the time Jith once faced when he was at the best school of all. He was selected as a school officer and on what grounds, he still did not know. He was told to apply and he did and he got it. Being a school officer inside that particular space was supposed to be a coveted experience. Who does not dream of wearing a tie and then strutting around the premises like Lucia Hami³ with her Giraya⁴ ordering people around. There was the occasional slap that was dished out, the occasional bullying and the order to make people stand up on their chairs. Maintaining discipline was a violent exercise and it was much sought after with glee. Since it was de-facto legally sanctioned violence, it was all the better. So Jith applied and Jith got it mostly thanks to certain people

who were inclined towards him thanks to them being his father's former students. Not that Jith excelled in studies or sports. He did not do both properly. But well, connections matter in the island nation state.

So, during the morning assembly when the names of those selected as school officers were announced, Jith felt proud. He managed to smuggle his cellphone, a Nokia 3310 to the school, and called his father and told him. Once the assembly was over, Jith knew what was coming up next, the usual egg rainfall. The senior senile school officers from his own batch threw eggs at them on the sly and in no time, he was drenched in eggs whites and egg yolks. Thank god he had sense enough to bring a spare shirt. What was an egg to those going to that school. There were hundreds and thousands living below the poverty line lacking proper protein and here they had people who had money to buy them and throw them around for the fun of it.

The cohort of new appointees were then ordered to come into the room reserved for the school officers after school. The room was denoted as a magical space, a space which one would gain access after a journey, similar to one made by Quichotte....Rushdie's Kay Shoot. The room was said to have a television, a color one at that, a bathroom and a host of other amenities. In reality, it had nothing of that sort. Just another narrativized imagined stinking community created by damn historical lies. The new recruits were taken into the room and Jith remembered walking into this dark space. The windows had black paper pasted all over them so that nobody from outside could see the inside and that itself was enough to make most of the recruits smell a dead rat. The room was spacious, had several benches, a sofa, a long table with chairs and pictures, old pictures of patriarchs looking down upon Jith smelling of toxic masculinity. The senior blokes were sitting down on the sofa and some of the benches while the prefects, the senior out of the senior patriarchs, were sitting at

the table with the head-prefect sitting at the helm. It all looked like a scene from King Arthur but in a rather perverted manner. Jith remembered a lot of hollering, shouting, abuses and what not. The newbies were ordered to give a small self-introduction, more abuse in choicy language was thrown at them and then they were dowsed in water and flour and was told to go run to the shop near the gate and buy the senior blokes Mars Bars and some other stuff. Jith forgot how many and what the other stuff were, but remembered that they were given a time to do so and had to run whilst water and flour were pretty much plastered to their hair. Then they were given a specific set of instructions and were told to report to the Cop Room i.e. the School Officers' room by 6.30am in the morning.

The new chaps were given a wooden bench, similar to one you find in a train station in Sri Lanka with the middle pole missing. The bench was about 1.5meters in length and all 30 odd new recruits were ordered to sit on that single bench. The fat sumo sized ones had to sit on the bottom and the rest had to sit on top of them. It looked like a weird homosexual orgy, males sitting on top of each other and it was enough to make Jith feel irritated. Not the fact that he was sitting on another classmate's thigh, but the fact that others had such control over their bodies, actions and even thoughts.

Jith remembered the ensuing days which were grueling. They were told to polish the red floor of the Cop Room till it shone endlessly, they were supposed to get the permission from a senior school officer before putting the tie on and were told to do this and that. Finally, the period of this nonsensical rag came to an end and on the final day, before the tie pins were provided for them, which in all reality was the symbol of authority, they were told to do several things. The new cohort was divided into several groups and each group had to practice a dance. Then individually, they were ordered to perform one sexy dance akin to a pole dance, sing a dirty song,

narrate a dirty story carrying sexual innuendoes and jokes. Seriously, how sexually frustrated one can be.

On the day, they were taken inside one by one other than the time where they had to perform the group dance. When it was Jith's turn, he was blindfolded and was taken inside the room. The old male lions inside the room started to roar, hum and haw like a bunch of buffaloes in heat. Jith was turned around and around several times and two slaps were given across his face and he was accused of going against the wishes of the seniors. Then he was told to stand on the stage and sing the normal song and the sexy song. The so-called stage was a tree trunk with two uneven stubs. So, when one stood on it, one leg was above than the other making it very uncomfortable. Jith was given a microphone made out of an old broom stick where the top part of the microphone was made by using condoms and was told to sing. He started to sing and the senior's howled saying they cannot hear him. He could not understand what was going on and when he looked around helplessly, he was told to plug the microphone jack in. He did not how to do that and the voice around him shouted to push his thumb into his anus. Ahh so that was the microphone jack. He did so and sang. He then was told to state the dirty story and do the sexy dance. At this point, Jith had had enough. The faces around him transformed into one and it looked a merciless a bloodhound, faceless ghosts mercilessly attacking you. The vipers.

After the performance, Jith was told to sprawl down and then put his head inside a small enclave. One senior the bright idea of stepping on his scortum and Jith remembered wincing in pain. The enclave had a garland, a mirror which reflected your own face and when you looked up, there was a head of a moose, the so-called God of the Cop Room. Jith was ordered to look up and was asked to say what he saw. "Moose" he replied and he was heavily reprimanded. Voices howled and said that is no moose but is the God of the Cop Room. Jith was

asked to say “Sadhu”⁵ three times and then he was told to repeat a mantra. Jith remembered the mantra. He was asked to repeat that he gave his bum to an assortment of teachers to get the school officership. Then finally, after the mantra, one senior school officer said that there was a concoction which he was supposed to drink which was said to consist of the sperm of two of his friends. He had to choose the sperm of one friend, chose one and then had to gulp the liquid down which in all reality tasted worse than what sperm could taste like.

Jith todate could not understand why he did not leave that room then and there but stayed on. It was prestigious but whether the humiliation was worth it or not became a different issue. He did not attend any such sessions thereafter, avoided going to the great rugby and cricket games and left the school at the first instance he got after the AL's without staying on to become a senior school officer. What fun to pay school fees and then get ragged by your own batchmates.

It was during the same time that Jith found Nira through an online chatting platform called Kaputa. These were the days when the cellphones were rare, sims were expensive, a SMS cost around 10 bucks and a call cost a fortune. These were also the days when the computer's modem used to make creaking, groaning and wheezing noises when it attempted to connect to the internet at speeds that would make the present generation have attacks of the heart. Jith smiled at the recollection of Nira and wondered what she was upto now. A simple facebook search showed that she had married and her sister, a feisty outspoken character back in the days had married too and even had children. Nira had a dog called Tepetta who used to say “ow” when it was asked whether it wanted to have pizza. Tepetta used to stay on Nira's bed and Jith used to wonder how she managed to keep a dog on the bed. Dog's did not wipe their bums, did they? Nira's grandmother used to sleep with her in the same room and it was very difficult to talk to her in the night. She had to whisper whilst wrapping her tiny blue

colored Sony Eriksson phone in a piece of cloth. Jith wondered whether her grandmother passed away with the passage of time.

Nira and Jith used to talk and even plan a non-existent future late into the night and they even met several times, the first being during the Wesak festival, on Baudhaloka Mawatha when she came to see Wesak with her mother, sister and Nippy her domestic aid. It was raining and Baudhaloka Mawatha was just two minutes away from where Jith lived back then, and he remembered running with his cousin to meet Nira. They held hands for a second, and departed. After that, they met several times, mostly to watch movies and that was it. It was mostly double dating. Her sister came with her boyfriend and then Jith and Nira plus Nippy came over as their nanny. A fine nanny she was because she rarely uttered a word to Nira's mother about the daughter's exploits.

Things went on for a year or so when on one fine day, somewhere in the early 2000's, the then President of good ol' Banana Republic decided to take over two ministries while the Premier was off on a foreign tour. The President went on to appoint two members of parliament from the opposition (which was the President's party) as Ministers which led to an early general election. One of the members, ironically, who took a ministry, was heralded as one possessing one of the finest liberal mindsets in the whole country. Jith smiled wondering how more liberal can a liberal person get. There was a cease fire agreement at that time between the LTTE and the Government of Sri Lanka, which of course did not go far. Jith and Nira used to waste a lot of time over political arguments, especially over the entry of monks into politics. Jith hated it. Nira, did not mind it and repeatedly pointed out that the "hamdurugollo"⁶ will win and that was the only time they did manage to win a certain number of seats, especially from certain districts in Colombo.

The Colombo elites at the helm of the ruling party at that time rarely understood the banana republic mindset, a mindset which was far from being politically literate. The racecourse elites, with their ties, big matches, regattas, the rugby and mustang tents failed to understand that macro-economic policies, austerity or for that matter so called democracy paid no real part in the majority of the Sri Lankan mindset. The premier was anyway labeled as Mr. Bean, failed to carry and pet children, and was accused of not being a very welcome person. His sexuality was questioned, the fact that he did not have children was highlighted, that too especially sons as opposed to the later savior of the nation who bore three hunks. All of them by the way had mustaches too, the sons. Technically, sexuality and family life were private elements, but in the grand old republic, they were not. The premier too mangled up sexuality and public policy to a larger extent by favoring certain human beings over others for reasons better known to him. His kitchen cabinet comprised therefore of incompetent, high headed royal buffaloes who had no real grounding in reality. It was obvious that the ruling party was going to lose and they lost the general election. Jith had to return back from his Colombo Seven reverie because his father had to resign and return back to Kandy which meant that they had to leave their official residence.

Jith never saw Nira after that, and for reasons best known to Nira, she also left her school and joined one of those new-found international schools. Jith, for the love of all the gods in the country, could not understand why her parents took that decision. Nira started going to study at one of her classmates' house. Jith rarely felt bad about it and jealousy was not a part of his total system back then. Out came Nira's birthday and Jith still remembered the brilliant argument they had where Nira called Jith an unthinking, unfeeling person because Jith did not give her a present, not an expensive one, but something like a card made by his own hands, whilst Nira's study buddy, who was a male, managed to do so. Nira called

him sweet and what not which reminded Jith of a tart in a bread shop than a human being. Unfortunately, Jith could not remember the guy's name. He was sure it began with J. But he forgot. Warning bells, alarm bells, a call for 119 or 911 and what not became necessary. Alas, she ditched him and started going out with the study buddy. How now, brown cow!!!! Jith was in his first year at University but yet he felt the sting and even todate he at times felt the sting though it was much less. This one incident made him feel insecure, and he stopped trusting people and their words. He held no animosity towards Nira, but it left a mark on his life which he could not erase. But he started to hate how politics began to play an intrepid part in his life. Somewhere, things done beyond his control, affected his life in such a drastic manner. Things were worse for the others. This was just an affair. People lost their lives, some livelihoods, some loved ones, some security and what not. The personal became the public and the public became the personal. There was no way it could be avoided in this state.

He moved from woman to woman and eventually got married, but marriage meant nothing to him at the end of the day. It was just another bothersome institution which gave the other person the right to have coitus whenever one wanted. Jith hated the power that stupid one-page document carrying two signatures could give either party. He hated the role society wanted him to play as a so-called married person. Parents in the banana republic were essentially a crazy bunch of people who rarely thought of their offspring as subjects with a consciousness. They failed to understand that they were separate human beings with separate identities. For them, kids were extensions of their lives and that they had to function. He still could not bear to call himself a husband. They were anyway two separate human beings with separate wants, separate temperaments and separate lives. Jith thought he fell in love only to find out that he was incapable of love and that he was not a person who could provide security. Jith

moved away from the marriage too and moved from one to another despite being married. It was interesting how his identity changed from being Jith to womanizer, from womanizer to somebody who committed adultery and from what not to this and that. “Badu Kaaraya”⁷ they called him and he felt scared every time he heard the name. Despite his outward appearance, he was tormented, terrified, unhappy and most of all broken due to all that went around with his life.

Looking up from the desk, his eyes almost half closed, lost in thought, Jith wanted to either end his life then and there or just find a way out of this misery towards the ministry of utmost happiness where he thought he would meet the god of small things. But what good will they do to him, thought Jith, and wanted Brett Ashley to “metamorphosize” in front of him to have a good time.

Jith felt extremely worried. His mind was going all over the place, a just like the broken republic. *Midnight's Children* was nothing compared to this wretched of the earth he currently inhabited. At least Saleem had Kashmir to look back to. Jith had nothing but wretchedness to look back and look forward to. I guess, he was a bit like the boy sandwich, stuck between the neurosis of Othello and the need to progress like good ol' Willy Lowman who was so different from Uncle Ernest. Or maybe he was like the Monk who copulated with his own sister “unknowingly”.

“Sir”, and Jith looked up, in a way happy to be interrupted from his afternoon subconscious perils. He looked at the clock and it said 1.30pm. “We are supposed to have a briefing” said Shana. “Hmm Ok, will come” said Jith and looked at Shana and smiled. They were supposed to have a B.R.I.E.F.I.N.G on how to teach an English lesson to a group of students. The students were like a parliament of owls and for all it mattered, Jith vehemently believed that English cannot be taught but if anyone wanted to learn it, they can. But yet those who taught

English along with Jith spent hours and hours preparing material for the lecture. There were constant debates on what approach(s) to follow when teaching English to students who almost had nothing to do with English in a major way for 13 odd years. Suddenly, the students had to switch to English to follow the degree program as that was in English. For a majority of the students, this became a severe burden and despite the need, they resented learning a language under duress. The union representatives made things worse by not allowing the students to use English to communicate within certain spaces and further dissuaded the new comers by saying that the mastery of this imperialistic language is not essential. Therefore, there was resentment towards those who had mastery over the language and towards the language itself.

This non-access to English was all due to various historical inequalities afflicting the banana republic and those who taught English at Undergraduate level were held responsible for correcting those inequalities. Jith found that particular imposed responsibility to be an ironic attempt at bringing about a rather forced notion of equality which itself was fraught leading to the creation of further inequalities carrying different textures. For hours, the English teachers argued whether they should follow Krashen, or move towards Chomsky, or whether they should stick to English for General Purposes or specific purposes. Then there was content language integrated learning and academic literacy models. Then there was outcome-based learning, problem-based learning and something called the Blooms taxonomy to look into. Arguments were ripe and eventually, the gang managed to settle for a model on principle. But It was all an immense mess which just led to the building of ant hills on the savannah. Jith knew that this briefing would also bring about the same Tamasha. But yet he went to the other room to join the others for the briefing.

The briefing, which was a grueling task, left everyone exhausted and rather worried. There was a problem in adapting the academic literacy model and the content and languages integration because the English teachers were not aware of the intricacies of the world of natural science. Though the focus was on language, you did require a certain subject knowledge in order to teach and despite reading a bit about them, it was difficult to traverse through the confusing labyrinths of cells, chemical formulas and anatomical planes. Students did ask questions at times and there was no way the English teachers could answer those. The staff generally argued that these teaching paradigms led to a severe erosion of their identity as English teachers and they became people who by doing content made life easy for the lecturers to teach content and that it gave no guarantee that the students' language competency would improve. Jith usually responded to these by saying that they were mere coconut pluckers in an estate belonging to someone else and that they had no other option but to pluck and pick coconuts. There was no real ideological space to challenge all these due to various reasons. They were precariously positioned in various faculties and could be removed, transferred and what not. Therefore, it was easy to play ball with them, and chuck them around when necessary. Though it was easy for the radical, the non-radical and the not so radical, the moderate, the not so moderate, "LEFT" and the liberal individuals to prate about activism, without spatial security and without economic security, activism was wishful thinking.

Things had changed over time. Hidden behind a mask for the fear of Covid 19, Jith felt comfortable. Once the briefing was over, he had a class to go to at 2.30pm which was a useless time to teach something like English. There institution had cut down on printing paper and there were no handouts to carry. He slowly started walking towards the class and saw what he thought was a familiar face. It looked familiar from one angle, and non-familiar from the other. So young, but he could see

several grey/white hair strands standing out. The familiar face smiles, and Jith looked up and smiled and the smiles departed. The moment of departure always brought about anxiety. In a way, once you are labeled, life was always easy in a labeled way. Jith was on the verge of asking why that person had grey hair. But then, he looked away and walked down the isle.

The day was long enough and life was grueling enough. A smile and a couple of grey hairs could do more harm than cyanide. Jith thought. Jith Looked away again and went. Unable to live upto his well, imposed label. Sad!!!!

Notes:

1. Popular Musicians/ Singers in Sri Lanka
2. Rasanayagam- A character in the play *Rasanayagam's Last Riot* by Ernest Macintyre
3. Lucia Hami- A character in Punyakante Wijenaike's novel *Giraya*
4. Giraya- An instrument used to cut arecanuts
5. Saadhu- The usual ending of a Buddhist prayer.
6. Hamdurugolla- A word used to denote Buddhist Monks in Sri Lanka
7. Badu Karaya- A Sinhala colloquial term to denote a sexually promiscuous person



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